

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

THE FRIDAY LETTER

Vol. 13 No. 6

Published by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service

March 22, 1991

From Personnel: All Sources Recruitment

This article summarizes, through questions and answers, the briefing and discussions which took place during the February Senior Managers' Meeting and the Personnel Officers' Conference.

BACKGROUND: Betty Jo issued a notice to all FNS employees on July 2, 1990 voicing her support of the policies and principles outlined in former Secretary **Yeutter's** plan entitled, "Framework for Change: Work Force Diversity and Delivery of Programs". The overall objective of the Plan is to build a culturally diverse work force to deliver USDA programs in an equitable manner nationwide.

Betty Jo indicated that the Agency's goal is to ensure that each vacancy is filled with the best qualified candidate without regard to race, sex, age, ethnic background or other non-merit factors. We want to build an environment in the Agency of open and fair competition in which no individual or group is disadvantaged.

In order to meet this goal, executives and managers were directed to seek candidates from all sources and simultaneously consider FNS, Federal, and non-status candidates who apply for each vacancy in accordance with applicable laws, rules, regulations, and applicable collective bargaining agreements.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. What is the goal of recruiting all sources?

The goal is to obtain the best available candidate for each vacancy without regard to non-merit factors such as race, sex, age, ethnic background or current Federal status. Management recognizes this policy will increase the competition for ad-

vancement. However, continuing to develop the best work force that we can is critical to the Agency.

2. What does the requirement to consider all sources really mean?

In accordance with OPM, USDA, and FNS regulations, principles and practices, and applicable collective bargaining agreements, supervisors should consider the following groups of candidates, including persons with disabilities:

- FNS employees serving under a permanent appointment or non-permanent appointment with reinstatement eligibility.

- Other Federal employees (with other USDA/Federal agencies) serving under a permanent appointment or non-permanent appointment with reinstatement eligibility.

- Non-Federal applicants who have never served under a permanent or non-permanent appointment and applicants eligible for appointment under special appointing authorities (e.g., severely disabled, certain Vietnam Era and disabled veterans, and volunteers from the Peace Corps or VISTA, etc.) and current Federal employees serving under a non-permanent appointment without reinstatement eligibility.

3. Is there a requirement to recruit nationwide for all vacancies under this policy?

No, the area in which the search for candidates will be conducted is developed to fit the type of position (e.g., clerical, technical, administrative, managerial). However, within the area which the search for candidates is conducted, we are seeking candidates from the three groups identified under answer 2.

4. What, if any, exceptions may be made to this general policy of considering candidates from all sources?

The following type of personnel actions are excepted from the general "all sources" policy:

- a career ladder promotion.
- a career promotion for which competition was held previously.
- positions upgraded due to additional duties and responsibilities or impact of person on the job.
- a reassignment within FNS to another position having no higher promotion potential.
- any temporary promotion.
- a position filled under direct hire authority because it is in a shortage category (e.g., clerk typist, secretary, computer specialist, accountant, etc.).
- any entry-level GS-5 or 7 position being filled under the provisions of the outstanding scholar or bilingual/bicultural authority.

It is important that all employees understand the goal and procedures we will follow in implementing this general policy. Each senior manager is responsible for assuring that recruitment actions are consistent with this policy.



Disaster Coordinators Meet at HQs

by *Phil Shanholtzer*

Disaster coordinators from FNS regional offices and headquarters met in Alexandria last week to talk details.

FNS goes into action when disaster strikes, to provide help to people who may suddenly find themselves without food. When that happens, the agency's disaster coordinators are the focal points for a great many decisions. They must also deal with an often bewildering, sometimes contradictory array of rules and responsibilities from dozens of federal, state, local, and private charitable agencies.

Last week's meeting was an effort to talk over both policy and practical matters and reach a consensus on operational details "while we weren't under pressure in a real disaster," said **Grace Sheffey**, who acts as the coordinator for the national office, and who organized the meeting.

"There are so many things that have to be worked out in disaster situations," **Sheffey** said. "How do we get food where it's needed? How do we decide what kind of help to give, and who gets it? What do we do if there's no communication, or no electricity or water, or the roads are blocked? Who's responsible for what? Who pays the bills?"

Staff members from the Food Distribution Division and the Food Stamp Program were on hand to help explain program rules for disaster assistance, and from Public Information to talk about communications needs. But many of the coordinators said the greatest advantage was simply to meet with their counterparts from other regions and agree on procedures and responsibilities. They also compiled their decisions into an agency plan to present to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

FROM THE EDITOR...

"The Swap"

No, this won't be as good as the Beano story (if you didn't see it, check the March 8, 1991, issue), but at least I've got your attention!

For the month of April, I will be detailed to the Public Affairs Office in the Western Region. In turn, **Kristy Bole** from WRO's Public Affairs Office, will be coming to work at headquarters. We are "swapping" jobs to see how FNS works both at the regional and national level. This is a unique career development opportunity for us, and we're real excited! This also means that **Kristy** will be the Editor of the Friday Letter for the next two issues, April 5 and 19.

To help **Kristy** out, I'd like to remind you that the Friday Letter is produced by and for employees of the Food and Nutrition Service. There is no writing or reporting staff; employees with ideas for stories take responsibility for seeing that they are written, have received the proper clearances, and submitted by deadline. Anyone can submit a story, but each writer takes responsibility for checking facts and ensuring accuracy. To submit a story or discuss a story idea, for the next two issues, you can call **Kristy Bole** at (703) 756-3286, or send stories or messages to the newly established Friday Letter cc:Mail Box.

Thanks for all your help. Look for full details of "the swap" in one of the May issues!

"Let's go do the swap..."



ON THE HILL

by *Bob Beard*

The Dire Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Bill (H.R. 1281) for 1991 received focused attention in the last week before the Congress adjourned for the Easter break. The "Dire Emergency" bill contains, among a plethora of other things, an additional \$200 million in funds for the Food Stamp Program, with another \$1.3 billion in reserve.

At the last minute, the Senate added a provision that would have increased the price of milk at the retail level substantially. The amendment was ultimately defeated during the conference on the bill. The Congress will return after recess on April 8, 1991.

Field Managers Meet at Headquarters

by **Bob Labbe**

On March 18 and 19, the Assistant Regional Administrators and Field Directors met at Headquarters to discuss upcoming changes in field office workload and to share with each other the initiatives in field operations that they have developed and implemented over the past three years.

The next two years will bring several changes to field operations, particularly for the Food Stamp Program Retailer operations administered by staff in Field and Regional offices. During the meeting, the field managers had an opportunity to discuss these changes with **Jordan Benderly** and his staff as well as to attend a demonstration of the new retailer data base prototype developed by the contractor designing this phase of software renewal.

Assistant Secretary **Catherine Bertini** stopped by to greet the field managers and to discuss the Agency's objectives. The field managers also had the opportunity to discuss workload concerns with George Braley and to visit briefly with Administrator **Betty Jo Nelsen**.



(back row left to right) **Brian Allison (MPRO)**, **Chuck Tercero (SWRO)**, **Karen Howard (WRO)**, **George Braley (HQ)**, **Bob Labbe (HQ)**, (front row left to right) **John Ghiorzi (NERO)**, **Gale Brady (MPRO)**, **Pat Cumisky-Czeto (MARO)**, **Rita Kilani (MWRO)**, **Len Mart (MWRO)**.

Congratulations Joe Leo!

Joe Leo, Deputy Administrator for Management, was recently named a recipient of the "1991 Federal 100" award, which is given by Federal Computer Week/FOSE (Federal Office Systems Expo). The award, based on readers' choices, honors people from Government, industry and academia who have "made a difference in the Federal systems community." **Joe** is the only person from USDA receiving the award this year.

EEO Advisory Committee Re-established

We have recently re-established the agency EEO Advisory Committee as provided for in Article 35, Section D, of the CBA. The purpose of this Committee will be to identify and document any barriers to the implementation of FNS's Work Force Diversity initiative. This committee is composed of four representative from management and four from the Union.

Union members:
Ed Euell
Ron Johnson
Noel Mercado
Lamar Pearson

Management Members:
Larry Brantely
Ann McCormick
Ron Vogel
Ramona Justice

The first meeting was held on March 21. The group will be meeting on a weekly basis in order to focus quickly on issues that can be resolved and hopefully result in positive action.

We are hopeful that this group will also serve as a model for future endeavors toward labor-management cooperation.

Food Stamp Directors Meet

Regional Food Stamp Program Directors had their first meeting with Deputy Administrator **Phyllis Gault** and staff on March 12-14. Although scheduled several weeks in advance, the meeting time coincided with Secretary **Madigan's** swearing in ceremony, making it possible for all the Regional representatives to hear his first speech to Agriculture employees. The Regional Directors and several Headquarters staff also had the opportunity to meet with Assistant Secretary **Catherine Bertini** and Administrator **Betty Jo Nelsen** for some meaningful discussion on Department and Agency priorities.

The range of topics covered at the meeting was broad and diverse -- from the impacts of the Farm Bill legislation to State responses to the impacts of the recession. Other topics under discussion included the changing directions of food stamp Employment and Training programs, the future direction of Electronic Benefit Transfer systems for food stamp issuance, coordination with the Aid to Families with Dependent Children and Supplemental Security Income programs, retailer oversight issues, management evaluation reviews, and the degree of risk associated with food stamp certification errors.

The final half-day session was devoted to more informal discussions about communications between the Regions and Headquarters, work priorities for the remainder of this Fiscal Year and next year, and budget planning for Fiscal Year 1993. The next meeting is planned to be held in conjunction with the APWA Association of State Food Stamp Directors meeting in September.



(left to right) Ralph Picone, MARO, Dave Bailey, Acting (WRO), Allen Nickels (MPRO), Phil Turner (SERO), Lynda Silva (NERO), Don Arnette (SWRO), Dave Mikelson (MWRO).

Food Stamp Partners Focus on Caseloads

Representatives of food stamp offices in Arkansas, Maryland, Missouri, Georgia, Arizona, Michigan and New York met with FNS staff in a whirlwind brainstorming session March 19 to develop practical approaches to coping with increased caseloads and dwindling resources.

Following a welcome by **Phyllis Gault**, Deputy Administrator for the Food Stamp Program, State agency representatives described the problems arising in their States as a result of increasing caseloads and decreasing State revenues. They reported overwhelming numbers of new applicants, many of whom were formerly employed and are new to the welfare system. Many qualify for expedited service, straining the ability of local offices to provide food stamps within five days of application, as required.

After identifying the problems, the group generated ideas for coping with immediate needs as well as proposing longer range changes in food stamp law and regulations. Then they categorized the ideas into actions that could be taken by State or local offices or by FNS through approval of waiver requests, development of technical assistance packages, and proposals for regulatory or legislative change.

Assistant Secretary **Catherine Bertini**, and Administrator **Betty Jo Nelsen** attended portions of the meeting and praised the efforts of the group to arrive at a set of practical recommendations. A summary of the meeting will be sent to all State agencies and regional offices.

Conducting group interviews of food stamp applicants and contracting out some food stamp activities were among the more than 30 sug-

gestions for actions State agencies could take. The group also suggested computer-based training or teleconferencing as ways of adjusting to the lack of money for travel to training sites and recommended taking various steps to improve the morale of eligibility workers and first-line supervisors.

Recommendations for actions FNS could take included expedited processing of waiver requests at the national and regional levels and approving requests, such as those for longer certification periods and simplified interview requirements, without cumbersome conditions. The group also suggested that FNS develop simple eligibility worker guides for household composition, vehicles, and student income and assist State agencies in exchanging information about successful case management practices.
(continued on the next page)

...Focus on Caseloads (cont.)


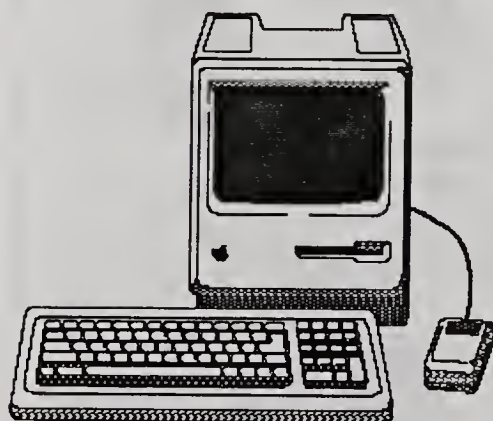
State agency representatives also proposed that FNS modify requirements for claims collection and computerized matches for wages, unearned income, and alien verification; examine alternatives to the current management evaluation procedures; and work to increase consistency among federal programs.

News Flash From the Administrator...

I've just learned that USDA collected over \$300,000 in grocery receipts for Van Ness Elementary School. This means that Van Ness will receive three personal computers with software because of the efforts of USDA employees.

Van Ness School needs our continued support, and I'm proud that FNS employees played a role in this worthy project.

Many thanks to all of you who took the time to help!

Operation Home Front...



...What a nice surprise! Here (l to r) Paul Jones (PDD), Mary Morris (OGAPI) and Paul Jones Jr. stop for a picture after Paul Jones Jr. made a surprise visit bearing gifts of thanks for Mary's efforts for the troops in Saudi Arabia. In addition to Paul coming home, Craig Carnes, brother of Larry Carnes (OAE), and Jonathan Seymour, son of July Seymour (PDD) are back in the States. Mary was also recently recognized by former Secretary Clayton Yeutter (below).



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

March 1 1991

Ms. Mary Morris
Food and Nutrition Service
Room 819 Park Office Center
3101 Park Center Drive
Alexandria, Virginia 22302

Dear Mary:

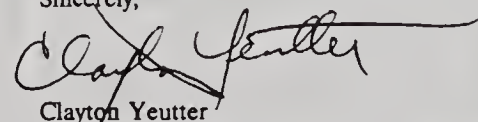
What a terrific program you have put together with Operation Desert Shield! You can certainly be proud of the work you have done to support our troops in the Gulf.

Your efforts are exactly what President Bush had in mind with his Thousand Points of Light initiative. It is generous and caring people like yourself that make our country such a special place to live.

The Food and Nutrition Service has earned a reputation for caring for others, and I am proud to have such dedicated people here at the Department of Agriculture. It is obvious that your Agency's mission is carried out beyond the office and into your lives by the personal commitment of the many volunteers who took the time to recognize and support our U.S. troops.

I wish you all the best.

Sincerely,



Clayton Yeutter

FROM THE HEALTH UNIT...

The Fitness Committee has been hard at work planning activities for the month of May. As you can see from the press release (to the right) that FNS is right on target! The kick-off will be on May 1 and will include some special speakers.

If you have any questions, please call any of the Fitness Committee Members.

Wellness Program

FNS together with Occupational Health Services, Inc., is sponsoring the Wellness Program, a voluntary health screening program which is helpful in detecting hidden diseases such as diabetes, heart disease risk, and kidney and liver diseases.

The FNS program will be held on Wednesday, April 3, from 8:00-11:00, in the 4th floor conference room. We are doing this separate from the Department, so please don't schedule yourself to go downtown. The cost for the screening is as follows (body fat analysis will be done for FREE):

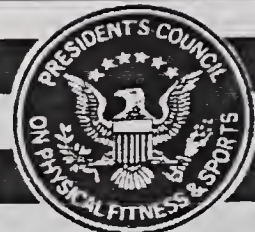
\$25--Cardiac Profile is the lipid panel which consists of total cholesterol, HDL, LDL, glucose, triglycerides and coronary risk factor;

\$30--25 serum chemistry tests to include liver, kidney, and bone function, glucose and lipid panel;

\$35--Cardiac Profile, 25 serum chemistry tests plus a CBC (white and red cell count to detect infections and/or anemia)

Payment can be made by cash, check Master Card and VISA.

To the right are six members of the Fitness Committee: (l to r) Scott Stangland (OA), Barbara Staiger (Jefferson Hospital), Barbara Perkey (FNS Nurse), Mark Porter (FMD), Russ Gardiner (CND), and Darlene Barnes (OGAPI). Not pictured: Ramona Justice (PED), Terri West (ASD), Bill Denton (POC Complex), and Scott Clark (The Center Club).



Contact: York Onnen
(202) 272-3427

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Federal Agencies Join National Employee Health and Fitness Day

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The Federal Interagency Health and Fitness Council has announced that Federal agencies nationwide will once again join in the observance of National Employee Health and Fitness Day (NEHFD) on May 15.

Last year, more than 3,000 companies representing 49 of the 50 states, plus companies in Guam, Puerto Rico and Canada, took part in this nationwide emphasis on employee health and fitness. It was the second year of the event, sponsored by the National Association of Governors' Councils on Physical Fitness and Sports, the Association for Fitness in Business with corporate sponsorship from Allstate Life Insurance Company.

With Federal agencies now joining the movement and the expected increase in company participation, officials predict that several million employees will be exercising at some point during the day.

"Those who participate can decide their own form of exercise. The main thing is to be involved," said Wilmer "Vinegar Bend" Mizell, executive director of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, which promotes May as National Physical Fitness and Sports Month and also participates in NEHFD.

The Federal Interagency Health and Fitness Council was created in 1980 under the auspices of the President's Council to bring together individuals involved in promoting fitness at the Federal worksite and to provide a vehicle through which public agencies could develop or improve fitness programs. The group previously had promoted its own highly-successful Federal Fitness Day in May.

3/1/91



Letters to the Editor...

I am writing to remind employees, especially those in the FERS pension plan, about the valuable benefits they may be neglecting by not participating in the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP).

Periodically, employees will mention the TSP to me or lament the fact that they are having a difficult time committing to a long-term savings strategy. They know they should be saving for the future but there never seems to be enough money left over after the bills are paid to put into a savings account. Yet, when I explain the plan, these same employees remark that it appears too good to be true. It seems that some of our employees may not be using the plan because they lack knowledge about its benefits.

The key features of the TSP that we need to make sure all our employees are aware of are:

1. The long-term savings feature "forces" savings through payroll deduction. This makes the money saved more difficult to "tap" and therefore, makes it more likely that the savings will grow.

2. Every dollar put into TSP is tax-deferred. This means that for every dollar invested, depending on the employee's tax bracket, take-home pay is reduced by only a portion of that dollar, which helps ease the savings pain. If an employee begins investing or increases the investment to coincide with the annual pay adjustment, his or her take-home pay may not even go down.

3. Additional benefits accrue to a FERS employee because of the matching program. For those under the FERS plan, the Government matches savings up to 5% of the employee's salary.

4. The combined effect of the tax-deferred feature and the Government match may be called "windfall" savings. For example, depending on the employee's tax bracket, a FERS employee who invests \$50 might have an after-tax investment of \$35 (take home pay is reduced by \$35). The Government matches the \$50. The result is that for this employee's investment of \$35, he or she has \$100 **IMMEDIATELY** placed in his or her **PERSONAL ACCOUNT**. Consider how long \$35 would have to remain in a regular saving account before it would be worth \$100.

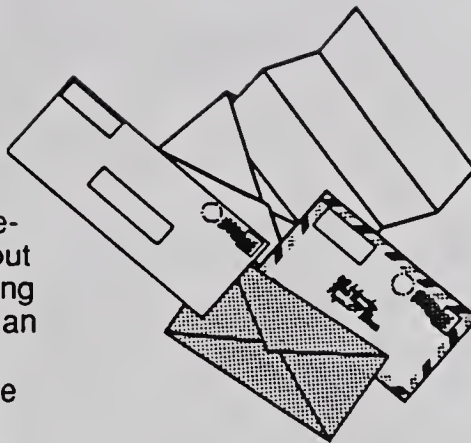
5. Any interest earned on the account is also tax-deferred.

6. All savings belong to the employee and are thus portable if one leaves the Government.

7. An employee can borrow from his or her savings if, for example, the person wants to purchase a home. This plan can be used as a way to save for a down payment on a first home. The loan principal and interest is paid back to the employee's account. So instead of paying a bank interest, the individual pays his or her personal account.

8. The TSP is an important part of the FERS employees' pension. Employees need to start saving, however modestly, for their future.

Steve Balsam, Director
Program Information Division
Financial Management



Speaking personally...

I've learned something important in life: there is only one thing that's certain, and that is that things will change. This year is not like last year, and next year will be different. In the same way, our Agency has changed and will continue to change, to meet new challenges and new opportunities. We must be the agents of change; if we're not, it means that change is happening in spite of us, instead of because of us.

While talking to the Federal Women's Program, I asked for examples of why people or institutions are motivated to make changes. Here are some of the examples the group suggested:

- Resources go up or down
- A problem needs fixing
- There is a need to help clients better, or in a new way
- Personal and organizational growth

I'm sure we can each think of situations where we were motivated to change something, either in our personal lives or in our work lives.

The point is that change will occur. I believe a useful thing that we as managers and employees can do is to be open to change, embrace it, and see it as an opportunity. I'd be happy to hear from FNS employees on their ideas about change, either through a "Letter to the Editor" or a letter or cc:Mail message to me.

Friday Letter Vacancy Listing by Vacancy Number

JOB TITLE	AREA OF CONSID.	SERIES	GRADE	CLOSING	VACANCY NUMBER	OFFICE LOCATION
Personnel Mgmt. Spec.	(G-LCA)	GS-0201	12	03/26/91	91-45	PED
Food Program Specialist	(FNS-HQ)	GS-0120	12	03/25/91	91-46	CND
Food Program Specialist	(A-LCA)	GS-0120	12	03/25/91	91-46 A	CND
Computer Prog. Analyst	(A-LCA)	GS-0334	7	03/25/91	91-47	IRMD
Nutritionist	(A)	GS-0630	12	04/15/91	91-50	NTSD
Budget Officer	(A)	GM-0560	15	03/25/91*	91-52	BUD
Sr. Labor Mgmt Relations Specialist	(A-LCA)	GM-0233	13	03/25/91	91-53	PED
Secretary Typing	(A-LCA)	GS-0318	5	03/25/91	91-54	CND
Computer Programmer Analyst	(A)	GS-0334	7	04/08/91	91-55	IRMD
Supvry. Computer Prog. Analyst	(FNS-N)	GM-0334	14	03/28/91	91-56**	IRMD
Emp. Development Spec.	(A-LCA)	GS-0235	11/12	04/01/91	91-57	PED
Emp. Development Spec.	(A-LCA)	GM-0235	13	04/01/91	91-58	PED
Contract Specialist	(A-LCA)	GS-1102	5/7	04/29/91	91-59	ASD
Food Program Specialist	(A-LCA)	GS-0120	5/7	04/15/91	91-60	PDD
Food Program Specialist	(A-LCA)	GS-0120	9/11	04/08/91	91-61	PDD
Food Program Specialist	(A-LCA)	GS-0120	7	04/15/91	91-62	PDD
Management Analyst	(G-LCA)	GS-0343	9	04/15/91	91-64	OGAPI
Food Program Officer	(A)	GM-0120	14	05/06/91	91-65	SFPD
Food Program Specialist	(A-LCA)	GS-0120	5/7	04/15/91	91-66	CND
Math Statistician	(A)	GS-1529	12/13	03/29/91	91-H-12	HNIS
Supvry Home Economist	(HNIS-W)	GM-0493	14	03/28/91	91-H-14**	HNIS
Supvry Home Economist	(HNIS-W)	GM-0493	15	03/28/91	91-H-15**	HNIS
Nutritionist	(HNIS-W)	GS-0630	13	04/01/91	91-H-16	HNIS
Nutritionsit	(A)	GS-0630	11/12	04/29/91	91-H-13	HNIS
Chief, Food Consp.Rsc. Br.	(A)	GM-0493	14	05/06/91	91-H-17	HNIS
Dir., Nutr. Monitoring Div.	(A)	GM-0401	15	05/06/91	91-H-18	HNIS
Nutritionist	(HNIS-W)	GS-0630	12	04/08/91	91-H-19	HNIS
Food Program Specialist	(A)	GS-0120	9/11	04/08/91	91-61A	PDD

AREA OF CONSIDERATION

- (A) . . . - All Sources
- (A-LCA) - All Sources, Local Commuting Area
- (FNS-HQ) - FNS Headquarters Wide
- (G-LCA) - Governmentwide - Local Commuting Area
- (HNIS-W) - Human Nutrition Info. Service - Wide
- (FNS-N) - FNS Nationwide

* - Corrects Closing Date

** - Temporary Promotion NTE 1 Year

OFFICE LOCATION

- CND . - Child Nutrition Division
- IRMD . - Info. Resources Management Division
- NTSD . - Nutrition and Technical Services Division
- PED . - Personnel Division
- HNIS . - Human Nutrition Information Service
- BUD . - Budget Division
- PDD . - Program Development Division
- ASD . - Administrative Services Division
- OGAPI . - Office of Gov. Affairs and Pub. Info.

**Darlene L. Barnes, Editor
and Desktop Design**
Pamela D. Faith, HQs Photography

The Friday Letter is published every two weeks by the Public Information Staff of the Food and Nutrition Service. To update your mailing address or to alter the number of copies you receive, please mail your changes to FNS Public Information Staff, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 819, Alexandria, Virginia 22302. Telephone: 703/756-3286

Upcoming Events

March

31 - HAPPY EASTER EVERYONE!

April

1 - APRIL FOOL'S DAY!

2-4 - National NET Coordinators Mtg., Memphis, TN

2 & 9 - Toastmasters Mtg., 4th flr. conf. rm., 12-1

**9-10 - 4th Annual Blg Cities Payment Accuracy Seminar
Lancaster, PA**

8-12 - Regional Systems Analyst Conference, at HQs

9-11 - PCIMS User Team Mtg. at HQs

10-12 - Financial Mgmt. Directors Conference, Dallas, TX